

## Rolando at Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit Work Attributes Toward Careers in Health (WATCH)

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Rolando Calderón moved to Montgomery with his wife and three daughters from Allentown, Pennsylvania, where he had been a truck driver for many years. Finding that the area had a higher unemployment rate than the national average and that many local companies hired part-time workers or temporary staff to save money, he was unable to secure a truck driver job that paid well enough to support his family. For two years he worked temporary jobs, as a dishwasher, warehouse worker, steel mill worker, construction clean-up crew member, and parts inspector. No job was too demeaning or small.

While hospitalized for a serious medical condition, Rolando was inspired by the skill and compassion of the nurses who cared for him and decided to pursue a career in nursing. It also seemed to him that half of the job openings in the area were for nurses.

It was a long process getting back into school after 20 years. He had to look up old records, take entrance exams, get a physical, and update immunizations. When Rolando started school as a 41-year-old freshman, he was both excited and scared. His first year he made the Dean's List, but his second year was extremely difficult. His marriage was disintegrating and he required surgery, but still he worked hard to maintain his grades. After completing all prerequisite courses, Rolando was accepted into the Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) program at Pennsylvania College of Technology, scheduled to begin in August 2011, but, despite receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, he struggled to find the additional funds to pay for nursing school.

At the suggestion of a friend, Rolando contacted the WATCH project, a Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance and found he qualified for the program. There he received financial help with tuition, books, and equipment and met a key supporter: career coordinator Gaye Jenkins, who became his confidante and counselor. He says, "During LPN training, when I was down, she was my cheering section. It is such a great feeling when someone sees things that you don't see in yourself and encourages you. Gaye always had sound advice and always strived to do the best for me, whatever my need."

Rolando graduated from the Pennsylvania College of Technology with an Associate's degree in Health Sciences (Practical Nursing) in August 2012. At first, he had difficulty finding a nursing job, but Gaye encouraged him and gave him several job leads. After he passed his state LPN exams and became a licensed LPN in October 2012, the very next week he was offered positions by four different employers. He accepted two jobs, a part-time position with a nursing home and a full-time position with a local hospital. The WATCH project provided uniforms and shoes for work, items he could not afford on his own.

Rolando says that without the help of the WATCH Project, “I really don’t think I would be where I am today. I am a college graduate as well as a Licensed Practical Nurse. I am in a career that is in high demand that also pays well. I now have a chance for a better quality of life for me and my children.” No longer dependent on TANF benefits, he is planning for the future. He wants to continue on the nursing career path to earn a Registered Nurse (RN) degree.